



## ***Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council***

*Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra, Chair  
Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Vice Chair  
Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.  
Councilor John Thorpe*

### **On-line Zoom Meeting**

Meeting Date: September 17, 2020

Note: The Finance Committee Meeting took place during the City Council Meeting as announced. The City Council Meeting began at 7 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 9 p.m., Councilor Sciarra called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were committee members Gina-Louise Sciarra (Chair), Marianne LaBarge (Vice-Chair), Michael J. Quinlan, Jr. and John Thorpe. Also present from the City Council were William H. Dwight, Alex Jarrett, Karen Foster, Rachel Maiore and Jim Nash.
3. **Financial Orders**
  - A. **20.118 An Order To Appropriate \$54,075 In CPA Funds For West Farms Road APR Project**  
Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

Conservation/Preservation Planner Sarah LaValley informed councilors that the recommendation was approved unanimously last fall by the Community Preservation Committee but was deferred until fiscal year 2021 so sufficient funding would be available. The order will create an agricultural preservation restriction (APR) on Hickory Dell Farm in the West Farms Road section of the city. The farmland will remain privately owned but the state and city will both purchase APR's, meaning that the farmland can never be developed and every subsequent owner will be obligated to keep it in farming. The overall acquisition includes 36.1 acres of farmland which is also prime development land. What's great for the city is that \$559,550 will come from the Commonwealth - mostly using federal funds - and the state also covers half of the survey and title exam costs. The city is responsible for a \$75,450 match, about 12% of the purchase price, of which they have \$21,375 already on hand, so this request and appropriation is for the remaining \$54,075. In addition, the owners are also donating a restriction on an additional nine acres at no cost plus half the survey's cost. This means the city bears about 10% of the total cost of the deal. For that, the city will be able to protect farmland, a historic landscape and the rural look of West Farms Road. The property also abuts existing protected land within the Mineral Hills, so it's just a great project all around.

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Councilor LaBarge said she's going to support this 100%. The Omasta family has been farming for generations. She remembers going to the Planning Board with Fay and John Omasta way back when she wanted to build a store there. Even back then, the family was being approached by developers to sell. They got approval from the Planning Board and opened a popular store. "They were like family to everybody," she related. "They are giving back to us and giving back to the community."

There's actually two payments here; \$635,000 from the Commonwealth goes to the Omastas in exchange for the development value they are giving up, she explained. "I'm just so happy about this; they deserve this," she enthused.

She is hoping they could look at the store at some point for educational purposes for farmers, she added.

There being no further comments, the motion passed 4:0 by roll call vote.

**B. 20.119 An Order for FY2021 Budget Transfers**

Councilor Sciarra reviewed the order.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

They budgeted the correct amount for all of the insurances overall but when the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) applied various credits, some of the amounts were shifted around, Finance Director Susan Wright explained. They are basically moving money from worker's compensation lines to the general liability lines but the overall budget for insurance is staying the same.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

**C. 20.120 An Order To Authorize Payment Of A Prior Year Bill**

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

Twice a year human resources reimburses a very finite group of former retired employees (about 14) who have to pay a penalty for Medicare because they joined after age 65. This was before the city required everyone to move into Medicare at age 65. It is a small amount of money. They reimburse them every six months. This reimbursement was due in June and it was just missed when processing invoices due to the COVID emergency. They just want to get this reimbursment out to these 14 employees.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

**D. 20.122 An Order To Appropriate FY2021 CPA Funds For Community Preservation Purposes**

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded.

The gist of this order is to take all of the estimated revenue for the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and put it into the proper accounts to allow it to be utilized for projects, Ms. LaValley explained. This happens once every fiscal year in the fall before the tax rate is set.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

E. **20.123 An Order To Appropriate \$25,000 For Northampton Policing Review Commission Staff Support**

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor LaBarge moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

This reflects the commitment that was made as part of the formation of the Northampton Policing Review Commission (NPRC), Mayor Narkewicz reminded. One of the pieces of that proposal was that the mayor would bring forth an order to support its staffing. In consultation with the Council President and Finance Director, they determined that this would be an appropriate amount to start with to provide for a temporary staff person to provide support for that commission.

The NPRC will be holding its organizational meeting next week and one of the items on the agenda is a discussion around staffing and how to proceed. This is fulfilling his commitment to bring forward funding to make staffing available.

It is being moved into the City Council budget but it's not paying an employee of the council, Councilor Sciarra clarified. In other words, the NPRC is not being staffed by the council administrative assistant.

Councilor LaBarge asked where the money is coming from. Is it being moved from the General Fund?

The city is basically raising and appropriating an additional \$25,000 of General Fund operating monies to pay for this which they are allowed to do up until the point at which they set the tax rate, Mayor Narkewicz explained.

Councilor Jarrett said he is trying to understand what this will mean for the tax rate that is eventually set. He expressed his understanding that, due to the cuts enacted in June, they are taking less from the fiscal stability fund. Does 'raise and appropriate' mean they will be seeing greater than a 2.5% increase? He asked.

They are not proposing to exceed 2.5%, Mayor Narkewicz stressed. They've said that, depending on where they are when they set the tax rate, they may have to come back and adjust the budget by making some cuts when they set the tax rate, he reminded. They fully reserve the right to come back at some point and use the fiscal stability fund.

The City Council always votes the budget in June, but technically the budget isn't finalized until the city sets the tax rate, Finance Director Wright elaborated. The piece of the budget that is still in flux is the revenue. They have to come up with a budget within the levy limit and balance the budget to match the budget approved. When they go to set the budget and see what they definitely are getting for state aid, they may be coming back to council and saying they need \$175,000 from the fiscal stability fund instead of 75,000.

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They may raise or lower their revenue estimates. Because they are paying a person a salary, they need to have it in a salary line item as part of a budget.

The budget really doesn't get settled until the city council votes on the factor for the tax rate and city officials submit the recap to the state to prove that they've balanced the budget, she advised.

As a named member of the NPRC, Councilor Quinlan thanked the mayor for living up to that commitment. Councilor Sciarra seconded that.

She called the motion for a positive recommendation to a vote, and it passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call.

F. **20.124 An Order Authorizing Acquisition Of Drainage Easement On The East Side Of North Farms Road**

Councilor Sciarra read the order.

Councilor Quinlan moved to forward the order with a positive recommendation. Councilor LaBarge seconded.

As councilors may know, the city and DPW are in the process of a major reconstruction of North Farms Road at a price tag of just under \$2 million, Mayor Narkewicz related. An existing 12" drain pipe in the vicinity of 211 North Farms Road runs through Mr. Vollingers' cornfield and needs to be upgraded to a 24" pipe to handle the volume of water. As part of roadway reconstruction, they fix undersized utilities. Because it is undersized, it causes sheet flow and flooding because the drainage system can't handle the level of water coming off the road. The pipe itself has been in place since before 1961 and some rough road plans show a pipe there since 1910. It is a long-standing piece of infrastructure. DPW Director Donna LaScaleia has been in conversation with Mr. Vollinger. There is not an existing easement on file that they could locate so, out of an abundance of caution and to make sure the city has a lawful easement going forward, they're proposing to purchase this easement. An appraiser has been hired and they have been working with Mr. Vollinger to accommodate his corn planting and harvesting schedule. They will be making all efforts to ensure the top soil is maintained. Once the new pipe is installed, they will be reseeding it with a special type of rye. The funds already exist and it is a fairly critical piece of drainage infrastructure for the North Farms Road construction project. He believes Director LaScaleia has requested two readings so it can be expedited in line with the construction project currently underway.

He referred to the map included in the packet.

As former chair of the Transportation and Parking Commission who met with residents of North Farms Road three years ago with Councilors Carney and Klein, he is really glad this is moving forward, Councilor Nash said. One of biggest issue with the rebuild is the stormwater that builds up on this low point of the roadway and this is where much of the deterioration has occurred. The fact that they are taking this step to address this is really terrific. This is part of the pipe replacement fund funded by the stormwater fee, he noted.

The advantage of having this dedicated fund is that it allows actual paving dollars to go further, Mayor Narkewicz added. In the past, the city would have been spending paving money to pay for drainage. It allows the city to dedicate Chapter 90 money for paving itself.

Councilor Jarrett said he is curious about where the water goes after going through the cornfield. It looks like it goes to the Broadbrook watershed. He wondered about the impact of run-off treated with salt.

The outfall is to an existing wetland, Mayor Narkewicz advised. As part of the project, the DPW has gone through a full permitting process related to wetlands and submitted a Notice of Intent.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

4. **New Business**

None.

5. **Adjourn:** There being no further business, Councilor Quinlan moved to adjourn. Councilor Thorpe seconded. The motion carried on a roll call vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting adjourned at 9:37 p.m.

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